

The time at which a young man becomes a full fledged fisherman depends on his own ability and progress. Age is not a criterion of skill after a young man has had experience. Perhaps when he is 24, a young man can handle every phase of the work, including catching the swordfish. It is common for a young and an old man to work together, the one as master, the other as novice. There is no stated apprenticeship period. In bad weather, or in rough seas, only the unusually apt young fisherman is allowed to bring in a large fish by himself because of the danger of capsizing.

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Types of Boats

All boats are now motor driven. There are 42 in the village, 41 of which are small skiffs. Three types of boats are distinguished: (1) the hatsudōki. This is little more than a good sized motorboat with a cabin. It carries about 8 men. There is one in the village. The small scale individualized character of fishing here is indicated by the smallness of the remaining craft. (2) the kuribune (literally, "hollowed out boat," from the verb kuru, to carve or to hollow out). Properly speaking, it is a boat carved out of a log, usually of the Japanese redwood (sugi) imported from Japan, but the term is extended to mean any small boat. This type has largely disappeared, and only one remains in the village. The hollowed out boat seems, in this area at least, to have become a lost art. It has been displaced by (3) the hagibune (jointed, pieced together boat). This is also made from the Japanese redwood and is constructed, often by the fishermen themselves, out of planks about 2 1/2 inches thick. There were 40 of these hagibune in January 1952. The number is never constant due to new building, losses at sea, or on shore from typhoon destruction.

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These small boats do not require much maintenance. At typhoon times, they are lifted from the shore up over the breakwater and lashed down on the side of the road. This may not avoid destruction. If the breaking waves are high and strong, they crush the breakwater, hurling its stones against the boats. Every two months, the boats are thoroughly treated by rubbing with shark oil. Cracks and small holes are repaired with small wooden plugs, called fundu in Okinawan. These are shaped like a stylized butterfly. They are inserted in the bottom of the sides of the boats across the running planks, that is, against the grain.

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Common Fish and How They Are Caught

In this area, many different kinds of fish are caught, but the following discussion is limited to the most plentiful and economically

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Division of the Catch

The division of the catch and the division of labor between the sexes in catching and distributing the fish are based on custom. In the memory of old grandmothers in the village, these customs today are substantially the same as they were in their childhood. The innovations since that time have been technical improvements such as flashlights for underwater diving, motors instead of sails or oars, boat building out of planks using modern hand tools rather than carving out logs, and manufactured fish hooks and gear.

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The mechanics of dividing the catch depend on whether the boat is a small or a large one. In Minatogawa, all the boats except one are small so that the division is simple. With the larger boats, the custom is more involved, as more factors have to be considered.

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In the case of the small boats, let us assume that there are two fishermen, the owner and a friend or relative. The value of the catch is ¥3500 with ¥100 expenses for gas and oil. The net value is thus ¥3400. This is divided three ways. The boat gets one share, and each of the fishermen gets a share. In this illustration, the boat owner gets two-thirds of the proceeds, one share as the owner of the boat, one share as a participating fisherman.

These partnerships are very fluid. No agreements are made in writing. Neither are there oral agreements to fish together for any definite period. The partnerships continue as long as the fishermen are compatible and form and dissolve without ceremony or formality. But a practical question does arise in the event of the illness of one of the fishermen.

In this case, a substitute is found for the duration of the regular fisherman's incapacity. This is informal and may be another friend or relative free to help out. The substitute gets the full share of the regular fisherman. In these partnerships, the owner of the boat pays for all repairs that cost money. The other gives his labor for repair and maintenance, such as oiling with shark oil, putting plugs in the holes or in weak spots, or assisting in carrying the boat to a safe place during typhoons.

The division of the catch in larger boats is also best explained by an example. Let us assume an eleven man crew with the corresponding shares:

- A The Boat's Share
- B The Captain
- C The Engineer
- D-J Fishermen
- K The Cook